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Cc: Lippincott, Jim[Lippincott.Jim@epa.gov]; Davis, Tim[Davis.Tim@epa.gov]
From: Thames, Sher
Sent: Tue 8/11/2015 6:27:42 PM
Subject: watch/listen to the USA Today reporter and Durango Herald Update

several other live reports <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VDFyBEOnaME> this was in the Farmington, NM newspaper

and update this morning

<http://www.durangoherald.com/article/20150810/NEWS01/150819994/EPA--Decision-to-reopen-Animas-River-a-week-off->

EPA: Decision to reopen Animas River a week off

From well testing to enhanced ground response, healing the Animas River will be complex

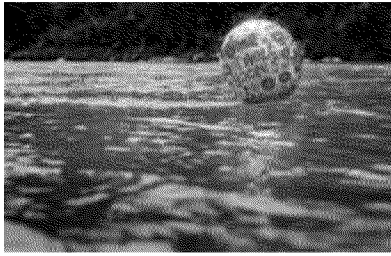
By [Shane Benjamin](#) Herald staff writer

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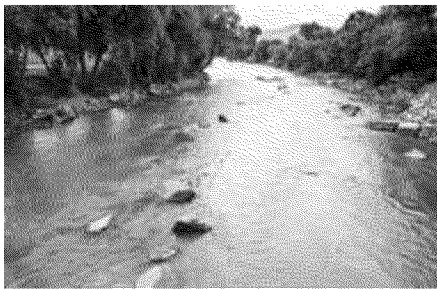
The Environmental Protection Agency said Monday it doesn't anticipate any decisions on whether to reopen the Animas River in Durango until at least Aug. 17.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Shaun Stanley/Durango Herald

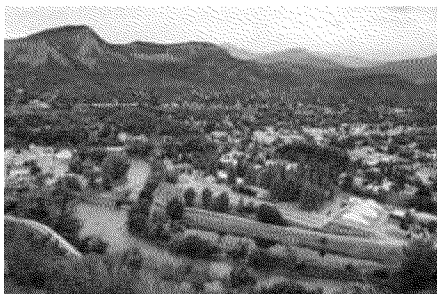
A “get well soon” balloon floats in the contaminated waters of the Animas River flowing through Durango on Monday afternoon.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Shaun Stanley/Durango Herald

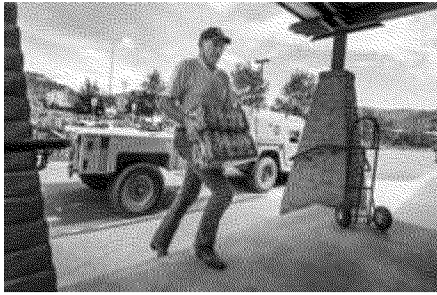
Although clearing, contaminated water in the Animas River remains a concern, and the Environmental Protection Agency says no decision to reopen the river will be made at least until Aug. 17.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Shaun Stanley/Durango Herald

The contaminated waters of the Animas River flowing through Durango on Monday took on a greenish hue.



[Enlarge photo](#)

Shaun Stanley/Durango Herald

Jim Bryce, with the La Plata County Mounted Patrol, stockpiles water at the La Plata County Fairgrounds in Durango on Monday. The water will be available to residents concerned about water quality in the Animas River.

Local, state and tribal governments will likely make independent decisions based on different segments of the river and the impacts, said Shaun McGrath, administrator for EPA's Region 8, which covers six states, including Colorado.

"Until notified otherwise, people should continue to abide by existing closures," he said.

Also on Sunday, Gov. John Hickenlooper declared a state of disaster that will allocate \$500,000 from the state's Disaster Emergency Fund to help pay for the response to pollution the EPA accidentally released Wednesday from the Gold King Mine.

The governor plans to visit Durango on Tuesday.

The EPA also said it is ramping up its ground response by establishing a "unified area command center" in Durango with an incident commander who will coordinate operations in three agency regions that include Colorado, New Mexico, Utah, Arizona and California.

EPA scientists plan to create a "risk screening" analysis based on different uses. They will use data that is being developed to identify if contaminants are acceptable for agriculture, aquatic life, wildlife, recreation and human consumption. They will also indicate whether the levels of contamination are down to pre-event conditions.

EPA officials have repeatedly delayed providing a detailed analysis of whether metals in the yellow-brown plume were dangerous to aquatic life, wildlife, crops, skin contact and human consumption. Wildlife that drank from the river during the height of the event should be fine, they said, but, based on preliminary results, the EPA supports local officials' decision to close the river to human activity.

La Plata County Commissioner Julie Westendorff said elected officials are as frustrated as county residents with the slow pace of sampling and data interpretation. Six days after the mine blowout, she still didn't know if the same water quality is needed for

different uses, such as agriculture, recreation or drinking. She hopes the EPA won't delay giving the green light for some uses just because the river is unsafe for other uses.

"We're looking at a river that looks pretty good," Westendorff said Monday. "We all want evidence that we can start using it in some form or another.

Scientists outside the region are helping to make that call, she said. "I don't get the impression there is someone sitting in this room here that is in a position to make that call."

County officials are working to identify water wells that are in close proximity to the Animas River that may be tainted by the mine runoff in the Animas River.

A multi-agency team will conduct sampling upon request of well water if discoloration is observed or if residents are highly concerned. If discoloration is observed in well water or residents are highly concerned, the EPA will provide drinking water. The county is also helping to supply farmers and ranchers with water for their crops and livestock if needed.

"I want our irrigators to know they are a high priority," Westendorff said.

The city turned off and blocked intakes from the Animas River on Wednesday before the plume reached Durango. City tap water is safe to drink, but Durango is relying solely on the Florida River for drinking water, which can provide adequate supply only as long as residents and businesses conserve as much water as possible.

No water restrictions have been put in place.

Aerial and ground reconnaissance indicated Monday that the plume associated with the Gold King Mine has dissipated downstream and there is no leading edge of contamination visible in downstream sections of the San Juan River or Lake Powell.

Contaminated mine runoff continues to flow out of the abandoned mine. The EPA has constructed four ponds at the mine site, and they are treating water by lowering acidity levels and removing dissolved metals. The system is discharging treated water to Cement Creek at levels cleaner than pre-event, the EPA said Monday night in a news release. Over the next several days, EPA will make upgrades to the system to ensure its continued operation.

EPA continues to collect water samples daily from the Animas and San Juan rivers. Fish cages placed directly in the Animas River indicate no mortality as a result of the spill.

"To date, we have seen no indication of widespread fish mortality in the Animas or San Juan," a news release said.

While lacking specific health and environmental impacts, the EPA is reporting a downward trend in water concentrations for metals at sample sites. The EPA recommends washing with soap and water after contact with river water to minimize exposure to the metals and any bacteria that maybe present in the untreated river water.

Dissolved iron in the waste turned the long plume an alarming orange-yellow – a look familiar to old-time miners who call it “yellow boy” – so “the water appears worse aesthetically than it actually is, in terms of health,” said Ron Cohen, a civil and environmental engineering professor at the Colorado School of Mines.

New Mexico Gov. Susana Martinez has declared an emergency that frees up state funds to address the wastewater plume as the Animas enters the state and joins the San Juan River.

Federal officials say more than 3 million gallons of water tainted with lead, arsenic and other heavy metals contaminated the Animas River following last week’s spill.

Martinez on Monday said she was heartbroken and called it an environmental catastrophe, and joined other officials in criticizing the EPA for its lack of communication and transparency.

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